



Feature

Clockwise from top left Old bikes are donated by a local bike shop. The first three trainees graduate soon. Staff demonstrate how to fix a puncture. Tools were bought from CTC shop. The staff

WORDS ALEX BAILEY PHOTOS BIKE CLUB

BIKE RECYCLING BENEFITS

Fixing up bikes can also help mend young people's prospects. **Alex Bailey** profiles Bike Club scheme Cycle Recycle in Cardiff

Two teenage girls stand and watch, their arms folded across their hoodies, mouths open with concentration, as they're shown how to remove a tyre from a wheel. The rest of the bike rests upside down two feet away, its handlebars and saddle against the concrete floor, surrounded by dozens of mountain bikes and BMXes, in this narrow, strip-lit basement. Old wheels and boxes of cycle parts are scattered around.

No, it's not a CTC member's garage. This is Cycle Recycle, a voluntary project operating from the grand Victorian town house that

houses Llamau, a charity for young homeless people in Cardiff. The teenagers have chosen to study cycle maintenance so they can fix up a bike to use as a cheap means of transport. Prior to this, Llamau's service users couldn't attend when they didn't have the cash for the bus fare. Their studies will also count towards an Agored award, an accreditation scheme for Welsh youth groups that will improve their employability.

NOT IN EDUCATION OR EMPLOYMENT

The 90-minute bike maintenance sessions run once a week and have proven extremely

popular with Llamau's service users. One of them, 18-year-old Paul, would have stopped attending all together if it hadn't been for the bikes. Paul is aspergic, dyslexic, suffers from ADHD and is prone to violent outbursts. School 'wasn't for him'. The Llamau staff talk of 'improved self esteem' among the young mechanics after working on the bikes.

When you see Paul's proud grin after he's just fixed a puncture, you understand what this means. You get the impression that, for Paul, this scheme has done much more than teaching him how to fix bikes; it's providing him with the hope of a career. Paul wants to



Above Fixing a puncture: getting taught like this is a new experience for the trainees
Right Paul now wants to train as a bike mechanic

'That's when Mel from Bike Club got involved,' Hugh adds. 'She's been a diamond.'

BACK ON COURSE

With the help of Bike Club Officer Melanie Davies, Llamau re-scoped the sessions around the Learning For Life model, with the stated aim of getting the trainees into education, employment or training via the Agored qualification. They planned a structured, seven-week course to train three people at a time, so they could offer one-to-one support.

Mel's other contribution was to put Cycle Recycle in touch with large local bike shop Tredz, which provides its time free of charge to check the quality of the repairs. The shop also off-loads bikes that they've taken in part exchange, providing Llamau with spare parts.

Their new model won the confidence of trainees, who stuck at it. The first of them are due to graduate this month.

Mel says: 'Those who have attended to date have shown a keen commitment to the recycling project and followed the full path to building a bike. They have then moved on to discuss volunteering opportunities in local cycling projects.'

“THEY STUDY CYCLE MAINTENANCE SO THEY CAN FIX BIKES TO USE AS CHEAP TRANSPORT”

› train as a bike mechanic.

These were the kids no one had time for, their needs too complex for the system to manage, and for one reason or another they ended up homeless. Llamau, which means 'progress' in Welsh, is their main point of contact with society.

The two teenage girls following the course also have chaotic backgrounds. Natasha was abandoned by her family and started to self-harm. Her behaviour in school became so extreme that she was removed at the age of 14. Her course-mate, Lauren, has attachment issues and she is prone to depression. Like Paul, both the girls are dyslexic.

When asked what they would be doing if they weren't here, Llamau staff member Hugh Russell answers, 'Nothing. That's the long and short of it. They wouldn't be doing anything. They wouldn't be in employment or education. That's why they end up here.'

SKILLS TRAINING

Yet they have shown they can learn the practical skills needed to build bikes. Seeing their reactions to the puncture repair demonstration, it strikes you that receiving instruction like this is a new experience for

them. Lauren says she wants to become a care worker to return the favour Llamau has done for her.

Llamau's Cycle Recycle scheme came about when four members of staff, all cyclists, noticed that the youngsters were dependent on relatively expensive bus services to travel to the centre. There was an obvious economic benefit to them becoming utility cyclists.

The staff undertook a sponsored bike ride from Anglesey to Cardiff, raising £1,000 to pay for bike tools from the CTC shop. Then they applied for a grant from Bike Club, CTC's youth development project, to fund their own training in cycle fleet maintenance, another service they obtained from CTC. The Llamau staff members donate their time to Cycle Recycle free of charge.

But it wasn't plain sailing and Cycle Recycle ran into problems shortly after it started up. When they began, they couldn't be sure which of the young people visiting Llamau, if any, would attend the sessions. 'Sometimes we would have five people, sometimes none,' recalls Hugh. 'There was no progression. We found ourselves teaching the same lesson week after week and for the people who'd been before, they'd already seen it.'

'The leaders have already discussed with other departments the possibility of linking the Bike Club users with the other programmes being run at Llanmau to extend the volunteering opportunities and enhance the employability of the service users. They have spent a lot of hours getting this right, making necessary adjustments to the programme to suit the young people at the club, making sure no one is excluded.'

'Tredz have provided credibility in addition to a huge number of good quality bikes.'

When asked about the key to the success of this project, Mel is unequivocal: 'The Cycle Recycle project leaders have been great to work with as they're all enthusiastic cyclists. This has made a huge difference.'

CTC manages 14 Bike Club Development Officers across the UK. To read about other Bike Club projects, visit the Bike Club website at bikeclub.org.uk. If you run a cycling project for 10-20 year olds and you would like funding and support from Bike Club, contact your local Bike Club Development Officer. Their contact details are available at bikeclub.org.uk/contact-us/

Paul, Natasha and Lauren are not the real names of the trainees. ☺